
Male on Male Sexual Violence

Male Survivors of Incest or other Sexual Assault

It is estimated that 5-10% of reported cases of rape or sexual assault each year involve male victims (Scarce, 1997). Some rape crisis centers see nearly equal numbers of girls and boys up to age 12. Researchers report one out of six boys will have been assaulted by age 16. Experts believe the number of cases are under-reported because survivors are less likely to report than are female survivors. Any male can be assaulted. Survivors are [gay](#), straight, and [bisexual](#). Most reported perpetrators are male. Several reports stated that the majority of rapes of males are perpetrated by heterosexual males (Isely & Gehrenbeck-Shim 1997, Scarce 1997).

The identification of sexual assaults committed against males is a recent phenomenon. Previous to the feminist efforts of the last 30 years, resulting in much more comprehensive laws and growing public awareness, rape was the only "sex crime" recognized by law. Only males could be charged with rape and females were the only victims recognized by law. Rape meant vaginal intercourse. Now, the term sexual assault includes many more of the behaviors by which people could be hurt. Many, but not all, states use the phrase sexual assault. Many states are beginning to recognize the sexual assault of males as a problem.

Boys tend not to be taught to empathize. We haven't taught boys that they deserve the right to feel safe in their bodies, that the autonomy of their body is sacred, that "no" equals "no" for everyone and that when stated it should be respected. Without teaching little boys to expect these rights for themselves, how can we expect young men to respect these rights for men (or women)? Little boys are not taught how to say "no" to abusive clergy, scout-masters, coaches, uncles, fathers, baby-sitters, and other potential male perpetrators.

Males are only beginning to recognize how many of them have experienced sexual assault. For reasons similar that female survivors, male survivors deny their victimization. Their reasons include 1) a lack of information to define their experience as sexual assault; 2) a sense that they will be disbelieved by people; 3) a fear of reprisal by the perpetrator(s); 4) an unwillingness to think of themselves as survivors of sexual assault and fearing all the potential changes in themselves that might inevitably ensue; and 5) a resentment that the behavior of the perpetrator(s) had or has the power to cause the survivor to expend time, energy, emotional and financial resources-and therefore essentially take control of their life-for an unknown length of time.

Sex or Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault is commonly defined as forced intercourse or sexual contact that occurs without consent as a result of actual or threatened force (Crooks & Baur 1998). Only recently, however, have many states amended their criminal codes to include adult males (meaning sixteen years of age and older) in their definition of rape (Isely & Gehrenbeck-Shim). All sexual assault is an expression of power, hate, and control. To many heterosexuals, an assaultive male is, crudely put, manifesting "homosexual" behavior. The majority of rapes of males are perpetrated by Caucasian, heterosexual men who often commit their crime with one or more cohorts (Scarce

1997) This demonstrates, again how straight culture confuses sex with sexual assault.

Any male who has been assaulted by another male has a disincentive to report the incident because many people assume that any male assaulted by another male is automatically gay. If the survivor is gay and the perpetrator is gay then reporting the sexual assault may involve "coming out" to authorities, which can be unsafe. Living in a homophobic culture which equates the rape of males to homosexual sexual behavior; a male survivor, who is gay or presumed to be gay, may assume that he will be disbelieved and harassed by the police rather than supported.

Some sexual assaults of gay males are committed by perpetrators who self-identify as heterosexual. The motivations of these men to assault gay males is similar to their motivation to assault females-to dominate and express hatred. Some sexual assaults of gay males are committed by other gay males. Estimates of numbers of assaults are impossible to come by with the prevalence of homophobia in the United States. Consent is what separates sex from sexual assault. Consent is not adequately taught to straight, bisexual or gay teens.

Sexual assaults are not sex. When a male sexually assaults another male: 1)neither male becomes a homosexual as a result of the assault; 2) it is not the manifestation of latent homosexual behavior. There are homosexual men who commit assault but the assaults they commit are not homosexual sex acts. When a man punches another man we do not call it "homosexual battery." "If you hit someone over the head with a frying pan, you wouldn't call it cooking." says Mike Lew, author of Victims No Longer: Men Recovering From Incest & Other Sexual Child Abuse.

Males Who Sexually Assault Other Males

Most of the perpetrators of sexual assault committed on male are other males. As stated before, the majority of perpetrators are heterosexual and Caucasian (Scarce 1997). The boy or young man who is a survivor can be confused, angry, blaming himself, hurt, desperate to understand. The hysteria and misinformation rampant about homosexuality makes understanding their assault very difficult for male survivors.

How Sexual Assault Affects You and Others

Some male survivors' confusion about their sexual orientation, can hinder their recovery. While some males assaulted as boys by older males come to realize that while they don't want to replicate the abusive component of their experience, they do want to explore consensual interactions with males. Gaining clarity about one's sexuality is much more difficult for sexual assault survivors.

When you are dealing with survivors who you know, they may "frustrate or anger" you by not wanting to report their assault, call it assault, change behavior that you find problematic or even destructive, or other things. You may be irritated with the survivors' rate of recovery or unwillingness to do things that you objectively know would be positive for them. Since the root of eating disorders, depression, and addictions is often incest and others sexual assault, our attention can be misdirected by manifestations of these "symptoms."

When you are dealing with perpetrators who you know, they too may "frustrate or anger" you by not wanting to call their behavior assault, change behavior that you find problematic, etc. Their resistance may be maddening. Their alleged act may well contribute to the polarization of their circle of friends. The presumption of innocent until proven guilty can be sorely tested. Additionally, you may know or like them as people, and experience difficulty believing they could "do" this.

You don't have to arbitrate, heal or solve this problem alone. Survivors need support not rescue. You will be helping yourself if you first look at your resistance or denial. Know your own biases and prejudices. And if you can't/won't listen at that particular time because you are busy/stressed, or this brings up discomfort from personal experience; you so not have to at the moment.

How to be a supportive listener for a friend/lover/relative who is a survivor of incest or other sexual assault

Most survivors never tell anyone that they have been assaulted. If someone tells you about their abuse, consider it an honor. You may not feel lucky but you are. Welcome to a very confusing, murky world.

- Believe them-they are telling the truth. Tell them you're sorry and it wasn't their fault.
- Really listen, don't jump to solutions. Ask what help they would like.
- Do not distract yourself with heroic fantasies to beat up the perpetrator.
- Offer to make an appointment with them to see a counselor, clergy, police, etc.
- Do not say that you know/understand how they feel. You don't, even if you're a survivor yourself. Your experience was not identical to his/hers.
- Suggest counseling in addition to talking to you. Professional counselors are very useful.
- There is no limit to how long the healing process takes. Saying things like, "You've got to forget about this." won't help and may harm recovery.
- Be aware of school/local support resources and share those.
- Sometimes you can't "do" what seems to you very much, but the "little" that you do may be sufficient for survivors now. Don't assume for them what they need.
- Give them time and space. If you're talking more than they are, you're probably not helping.
- Do not give advice, even if asked for it. Survivors of sexual assault have had their power profoundly taken from them. Making decisions overprotects them and may send a message that you think they're incompetent. Help them problem-solve by offering all possible options. Offer to support whatever decision they make, then do it.
- Get support for yourself too-the more you care, the more you are affected. Look inward; pay attention to your own feelings, your needs are valid too.
- Don't burden the survivor with your "stuff." Males learn to expect others to "take care of" our emotional needs and want them to explain to us what we are thinking/feeling about their trauma. It isn't wrong for us to have emotional needs. It is wrong for us to add to the survivor's burden.
- Respect their need for absolute confidentiality. Not making their secret public may be the only safe thing for them to do as they see it. If you get support for yourself as an affected "significant other," do not tell the details of the abuse to anyone. If a person who you confide in presses you to identify the survivor, do not tell them. If you help make the details of the assault public, you will do the survivor harm.

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- Check-in with a person before leaping into an intense follow-up discussion. Don't assume that the level of disclosure that you shared previously is acceptable currently or later when you talk to that person. If you want to talk further, recognize that this might not be a good time for him/her to talk.
 - Sometimes a friend/lover/relative will share that they were assaulted by someone. Some survivors never bring it up again. Some refuse to talk further about it. Some even avoid you. This doesn't necessarily have anything to do with you. You might be the only person they have confided in and every time they see you they recall their abuse. Don't punish them for your feeling of being used if that is how you feel. Similarly, you may choose approach them at a private time and ask them if they want to talk further. If they don't, that's fine. If they do, that's also fine as long as you both feel comfortable and safe.
 - When a survivor tells you that they have been abused, you may feel uncomfortable for a variety of reasons. You have the right to state that what they are telling you is too difficult for you to hear. You may help them find someone else who can be there for them.
 - If anything you hear or feel resonates for you as you hear their story, it does not prove that you are a survivor. If you are a survivor and you are feeling old feelings again, there are (hopefully) caring resources available in your community.
 - Some people will seek out a stranger to tell their story to. They may feel safer telling their story to someone they won't see again, feeling safer with anonymity this person provides. We all deserve the right to feel safe. (Protective Behaviors, Inc).
 - Remember the value you place on a friend who took the time to really listen to you.

Possible Reactions of Male and Female Incest or other Sexual Assault Survivors

Note: I include this sections to illustrate the multitude of sometimes contradictory effects that sexual assault survivors experience. This list was created from several lists that compiled responses of many survivors, both male and female. Not all survivors necessarily experience all or even most of these.

- Nightmares
- Swallowing and gagging sensitivity (suffocation feelings)
- Alienation from the body-poor body management. Manipulating body size to avoid sexual attention.
- Fear that everyone is a potential attacker
- Eating disorders, drug or alcohol abuse; other addictions; compulsive behaviors
- Self-destructiveness; skin carving; self-abuse
- Suicidal thoughts, attempts, obsessions; Depression (sometimes paralyzing); seemingly baseless crying
- Inability to express anger; fear of actual or imagined rage; constant anger
- Intense hostility toward entire gender or ethnic group of the perpetrator
- Depersonalization; going into shock, shutdown in crisis
- A stressful situation is always a crisis; psychic numbing
- Physical pain or numbness associated with a particular memory, emotion (for example anger), or situation (for example sex)
- Rigid control of one's thought process; humorlessness or extreme solemnity
- Nervousness about being watched or surprised; feeling watched
- Trust issues; inability to trust; trusting indiscriminately
- High risk behaviors; inability to take risks

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- Boundary issues; control power, territorial issues; fear of losing control
 - Obsessive/compulsive behaviors
 - Guilt, shame; low self-esteem, feeling worthless, high appreciation of small favors by others
 - No sense of own power or right to set limits or say no
 - Pattern of relationships with much older persons (beginning in adolescence)
 - Blocking out part of childhood (especially ages 1-12), or specific person or place
 - Feeling of carrying an awful secret; urge to tell, fear of its being revealed
 - Certainty that no one will listen; feeling "marked" ("The Scarlet Letter")
 - Feeling crazy; feeling different; feeling oneself to be unreal and everybody else to be real, or vice versa; creating fantasy worlds, relationships, or identities
 - Denial; no awareness at all; repression of memories; pretending
 - Sexual issues: sex feels "dirty"; aversion to being touched (especially in gynecological exam); strong aversion to or need for) particular sex acts; feeling betrayed by one's body; trouble integrating sexuality and emotionality; compulsively "seductive" or compulsively asexual; must be sexual aggressor, or cannot be; impersonal, "promiscuous" sex with strangers concurrent with inability to have sex in an intimate relationship; sexual acting out to meet anger or revenge needs; sexualizing of meaningful relationships. Note: Homosexuality is not an after effect.
 - Limited tolerance for happiness; reluctance to trust happiness

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